

Fiscal Year 2006 Drug Control Budget Funding Cuts BACKGROUND

**Mark E. Souder, Chairman
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources
Committee on Government Reform
U.S. House of Representatives
202-225-2577**

BACKGROUND

The Administration is asking Congress to eliminate all funding for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (“Byrne Grants”) program. In fiscal year 2005, Congress appropriated \$634 million for these grants.

On March 10th, 2005, the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources held a hearing entitled “**Fiscal Year 2006 Drug Control Budget and the Byrne Grants, HIDTA, and other law enforcement programs: Are we jeopardizing federal, state and local cooperation?**” (<http://reform.house.gov/CJDPHR/>)

The purpose of the hearing was to discuss the potential impact of the President’s FY 2006 budget proposal on state and local law enforcement – particularly drug enforcement. We wanted to hear from state and local law enforcement agencies that are working honestly and heroically to protect communities in every part of the nation from the threat of drugs and violent crime.

The Administration’s decision – to scale back federal support for state and local anti-drug efforts – is troubling. The President is proposing the total elimination of the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (the “Byrne Grants”) to the states for law enforcement support, the reduction (by more than half) of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program and the transfer of its remaining funds to the control of the federal Justice Department, and the elimination of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools state grant program. The message sent by these proposals is that federal funds previously used to support state and local drug enforcement or prevention efforts will now be spent exclusively on federally-controlled programs.

We do not agree that all federal assistance to state and local agencies lacks national impact or importance. State and local law enforcement personnel are fighting on the “front lines” in the struggle to stop drug trafficking. Local schools are the best venue through which we can educate young people on the dangers of drug abuse. State and local prisons house most of the nation’s drug offenders. Federal assistance to these agencies can have a major positive impact, by involving them in the national goals of enforcement, treatment, and prevention.

At the hearing, we discussed this proposal in detail with Administration officials and a group of seven law enforcement professionals from around the country

IMPACT

- The Administration's written statement did not mention the term Byrne Grants during the hearing, except on the title pages. The Administration had no measure of the impact.
- We believe the proposed cut to the Byrne Grants, if adopted by Congress, would have a severe impact on drug enforcement throughout the country.
- State and local agencies make over 95 percent of the arrests of drug violators.¹ Besides fighting on the "front lines" in the struggle against drug trafficking, these agencies gather a wealth of information and intelligence is of great value to federal agencies.
- Sheriff Jack Merritt of Greene County, Missouri (Congressman Roy Blunt's hometown Sheriff), for example, testified that without the assistance of Byrne Grants and HIDTA, he would not be able to maintain the joint DEA, state, and local anti-meth task force in his county. Vital equipment such as bulletproof vests and in-car cameras, which his officers need to protect themselves while carrying out meth trafficking investigations, could not be purchased. He spoke eloquently of the children he and his officers find at meth lab sites – children who are at severe risk. Sheriff Merritt stated that if his task forces are forced to shut down, he wonders how many more generations of children will be condemned to the same fate.
- Meth enforcement is just one of the many vital drug and crime control programs that would be put at risk by the Administration's proposed cut.
- According to Mr. Mark Henry, President of the Illinois Drug Enforcement Officer's Association, Byrne Grants help local police departments fill a critical gap which exists between various federal drug enforcement programs. The overwhelming majority (87.6%) of all police departments in the United States have less than 50 officers, and Byrne Grants play a critical role in supporting multi-jurisdictional drug task forces, which are the backbone for local law enforcement agencies.
- Mr. Henry provided the following excerpts from various Directors and Commanders of local drug task forces commenting on the impact of eliminating Byrne Grant funding:
- "If Federal funds under the Byrne program are eliminated our unit will lose three (3) agents. The loss of these agents will cripple our ability to continue effective narcotics investigations. Narcotics trafficking will go unchecked and spread. We might as well turn the keys to our communities over the gangs."
- "All of the law enforcement agencies, the business and education community rely heavily on the task force's expertise in combating the fight against drugs...Without the existence of the task force violent crime and burglaries will likely increase dramatically."
- "The elimination of the Byrne Grant would have a catastrophic effect on the Metropolitan Enforcement Group of Southwest Illinois...."
- "Without the funding that we currently receive from the Byrne Grant our mission would be all but non existent..."

¹ *Crime in the United States, 2002*. Uniform Crime Report, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Department of Justice.

- “The elimination or reduction of Byrne funding would...force police officers off the street to do clerical work...eliminate communication equipment such as pagers and cell phones...eliminate federal funding to reimburse a portion of officer overtime costs.”
- “The elimination of the Byrne funding will have a very NEGATIVE impact...on our ability to address the drug problems in the Lake County area...The loss of the funding will cause us to eliminate the staff positions, this will cause the jobs they now perform to be reassigned to Police Officers...”
- “Task Force 6 is the primary drug enforcement entity in this area and has been a fixture in this area since 1983...The proposed Byrne cuts will result in the closure of this unit. Narcotics related crime will increase dramatically and drug dealers will operate at will without the presence of Task Force 6.”
- “The elimination or reduction of this grant would have a very severe impact on the Task Force...At the present time the funding accounts for 50% of the Task Force funds with the remaining 50% made up from fines and forfeiture’s. I strongly believe that the elimination of this funding would force the Task Force to close its doors.”

The Byrne Grants program is just one of several vital drug and crime control programs that would be put at risk by the Administration’s proposed cuts. Please contact the Members of the Appropriations Committee and ask that the Byrne Grants be funded at last year’s appropriated level of \$634 million.

STAFF CONTACT

Questions may be directed to Marc Wheat or Pat DeQuattro at (202) 225-2577.